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The role of the United Nations system in supporting the efforts of African countries to achieve sustainable development

Letter dated 30 April 2001 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

The Security Council, in the statement of its President of 21 December 2000 on the situation in Guinea (S/PRST/2000/41), welcomed my decision to dispatch an Inter-Agency Mission to West Africa. The Security Council supported its earliest possible departure, and indicated that it looked forward to the Mission's report and recommendations.

Following the briefing of the Security Council on 10 April 2001 on the outcome of the Mission, it was proposed by the members of the Security Council that the report should also be considered by the Economic and Social Council.

I have the honour, therefore, to submit herewith for the consideration of the Economic and Social Council the report of the Inter-Agency Mission, which visited 11 West African countries from 6 to 27 March 2001. I should be grateful if you could bring the report to the attention of the members of the Economic and Social Council.

(*Signed*) Kofi A. **Annan**

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Towards a comprehensive approach to durable and sustainable solutions to priority needs and challenges in West Africa

Report of the Inter-Agency Mission to West Africa

I. Introduction

1. The Security Council mission to Sierra Leone, which also visited Guinea, Mali, Nigeria and Liberia between 7 and 14 October 2000, concluded, in its report (S/2000/992), that the highest priority must be given to the coordination of a comprehensive strategy with clear objectives to address the different aspects of the crisis in Sierra Leone and its underlying causes. It noted that only when all stakeholders — the Government and people of Sierra Leone, the region and the international community — act together through an agreed and interlocking approach will the latent potential for the country and the region to emerge from crisis be fulfilled. It was further observed that no lasting progress can be made in Sierra Leone without comprehensive action to tackle the current instability in the West African subregion, in particular in the Mano River Union member countries.

2. Subsequent to that report, the Secretary-General established an inter-agency Task Force on the West African Subregion, coordinated by the Department of Political Affairs, to provide recommendations concerning a coordinated and coherent United Nations response aimed at addressing the multifaceted problems confronting the subregion, taking into account initiatives under way or being proposed by various actors.

3. The Task Force comprises representatives of the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department for Disarmament Affairs, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator, the United Nations Development Group, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

4. Following its establishment, the Task Force met weekly and has monitored the developments in the subregion, in particular the situation along the borders between Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. In this regard, it has brought to the attention of the Executive Committee on Peace and Security developments requiring the urgent attention of the Secretary-General and the Security Council.

5. In December 2000, the Secretary-General decided to dispatch an inter-agency mission to West Africa, to be led by the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Ibrahima Fall. On 21 December, in a statement by its President on the situation in Guinea (S/PRST/2000/41), the Security Council welcomed the proposed mission, supported its earliest possible departure and indicated that it looked forward to its report and recommendations.

II. Establishment and activities of the Mission

6. The Inter-Agency Mission was composed of representatives of the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department for Disarmament Affairs, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OHCHR, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), UNDP, the United Nations Development Group, UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP, and the secretariat of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Within the framework of the partnership between the United Nations and ECOWAS, the ECOWAS secretariat was kept informed about the activities of the Task Force and was involved in the preparations for the Mission. The Mission's terms of reference were the following:

- To take stock of priority needs and challenges in the West African subregion in the areas of peace and security, humanitarian affairs and economic and social development, including the inter-linkages between them.
- To consult with Governments in the subregion and with ECOWAS on ways and means of enhancing cooperation with the United Nations in

order to better address those needs and challenges.

- To make recommendations on elements of a subregional strategy to be implemented by the United Nations, in cooperation with ECOWAS, to help address the needs and challenges identified.

- To make recommendations on mobilizing the provision of international support and assistance for the elements of the proposed subregional strategy.

7. Considerable prior planning was undertaken for the work of the Mission. A committee was established which researched a range of issues relevant to its terms of reference concerning the countries to be visited and also the subregion, for the production of a briefing book for the participants. A second committee produced questions tailored for the government officials, United Nations country teams, representatives of civil society and other interlocutors in each country to be visited, which were sent for their consideration in advance of the arrival of the Mission.

8. A number of criteria were established to determine which countries in the subregion should be visited. These included countries facing particularly difficult internal problems and where conflicts were occurring or where there was a risk of conflict breaking out. Some countries were selected because of the spillover effects on them of the internal problems of other countries in the subregion. The Mission visited those countries viewed as being particularly influential in the subregion, among which were those whose heads of State hold leadership positions in regional and subregional organizations.

9. The Mission visited Senegal (7 and 8 March), Nigeria (9-11 March), Togo (11 and 12 March), Liberia (12 and 13 March), Côte d'Ivoire (13-16 March), Ghana (16 and 17 March), Sierra Leone (17 and 18 March), Guinea (19 and 20 March), Guinea-Bissau (21 March), the Gambia (21 and 22 March) and Mali (22-27 March). It was not possible, because of time constraints, for the Mission to visit all of the countries of the subregion, even though some of the countries not visited fitted the set criteria. The list of participants is annexed to this report.

10. The Mission held frank and open discussions with all its interlocutors, in line with its terms of reference. In Ghana, the Mission was received in audience by the head of State. In the other countries visited, it held extensive working sessions with the heads of State. In Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Senegal and Togo, the Mission also met with the Prime Ministers and in all countries visited it met with a number of cabinet ministers. Its other interlocutors included the United Nations country teams, members of the diplomatic corps, parliamentarians, political party representatives, religious leaders, representatives of civil society groups and non-governmental organizations. It met with the Executive Secretary and staff of the ECOWAS secretariat, staff of the Mano River Union secretariat and the Chairman of the Commission of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), the President of the African Development Bank and the Governor of the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO).

11. During the Mission's meetings, the idea of a comprehensive and integrated approach to the priority needs and challenges of the subregion was extensively discussed. Within that context, views were exchanged on a range of issues including in the areas of peace and security, governance, national reconciliation, promoting political dialogue, human rights, humanitarian issues, subregional integration and enhancing cooperation with ECOWAS and other subregional organizations. Additionally, the Mission discussed social and economic issues including the HIV/AIDS pandemic, alleviating poverty and the external debt, as well as debt reduction or cancellation measures. Other issues discussed were the problem of illegal arms trafficking and its connection to the sale of "conflict diamonds", the proliferation of arms and militias, landmines, and issues affecting children, including the problem of child soldiers.

12. Country-specific issues discussed included the introduction of sharia law in northern Nigeria and the economic upheaval in the Niger delta, the conflict in the Casamance region in Senegal, the situation in Côte d'Ivoire and the problems being faced in Guinea-Bissau. Other issues were the situation in Sierra Leone and its impact on the other Mano River Union member countries and the border crisis between Guinea and Liberia, including prospects for dialogue between Presidents Lansana Conté and Charles Taylor on the issue.

III. Findings of the Mission

A. Peace and security issues

1. General overview

13. Throughout the Mission's visit the gravity of the political and security situation in the West African subregion and the potential for the rapid spread of insecurity and instability, unless urgent steps are taken to address the causes of conflict and turmoil in several countries, were repeatedly underscored. Most interlocutors foresaw a deterioration of the situations in the Mano River Union countries, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau and the Casamance region of Senegal, with serious attendant implications for the whole subregion, if progress was not urgently made towards addressing the political, economic and social dimensions of the problems faced. The possibility of a "domino effect", with instability spreading rapidly from one country to another within the subregion is a source of deep and widespread concern.

14. The importance of approaching conflict prevention and resolution from a regional rather than a national perspective was stressed to the Mission. Conflicts can no longer be viewed in isolation, nor can humanitarian problems within single countries in the subregion be viewed as specific and internal. It was repeatedly noted that the problems in the subregion have been compounded by a lack of political dialogue among leaders and lack of national reconciliation, persistent economic decline and high levels of poverty, the trade in arms and proliferation of militias, narcotics trafficking, disease, resource scarcity and the often violent and aggressive attempts at transnational control of natural resources by state and non-state actors. In some countries, the Mission noted wide disparities in perception of the situation between the Government and other interlocutors.

15. The conflicts in the subregion have been marked by widespread human rights abuses which have left families dispossessed, individuals traumatized and communities in a state of virtual collapse. Ethnic affinities, which transcend national boundaries, in countries such as Senegal, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia, have in a number of ways helped to mitigate the humanitarian effects of conflicts in the subregion. However, they have also contributed to the rapid spread of conflicts in border areas, especially in areas where militia groups and other actors have carved out territories for control, with tragic implications for civilians.

16. The rising tensions between the Mano River Union countries (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) and possible escalation of the conflict between Guinea and Liberia were issues of wide concern among the Mission's interlocutors. The importance of efforts by ECOWAS leaders and the United Nations to promote reconciliation between the leaders of the three countries and the need for the development of a concerted approach by the three Governments to the conflicts in the area was stressed. Concern was expressed at the alleged involvement of state and non-state actors in providing support for the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone. Several interlocutors were of the view that such support was being provided by Governments, both within and outside the subregion, and actors such as dealers in conflict diamonds, mercenaries and international arms dealers. Political and social turmoil in Côte d'Ivoire since the overthrow of the Government of President Henri Konan Bédié in December 1999, exacerbated by the disputes over national identity, and rising intolerance have resulted in the departure from the country of thousands of West African workers, with far-reaching repercussions for the country and subregion.

17. The democratic transition in Guinea-Bissau has yet to yield tangible results. With little technical expertise within government institutions, deep levels of poverty, an undeveloped private sector with few prospects for inward investment, few avenues for employment, coupled with an over-sized army which is dependent on the State for resources, the situation in Guinea-Bissau is very fragile. Without national political will to overcome internal divisions and without concerted international support, this situation may lead to the collapse of the State, with tremendous security and humanitarian implications for neighbouring countries. The potentially negative effects of continuing instability in Guinea-Bissau on Guinea, the Gambia and the Casamance area and the need for concerted assistance to be provided to the country by the international community was repeatedly stressed.

18. Regarding the Casamance, the signing of peace agreements by the Government of Senegal and representatives of MFDC (Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance) in March 2001, and the

reinvolvement of the Gambia in the peace process, are welcome developments. However, splits that have occurred within MFDC are likely to complicate efforts to implement the agreement, despite steps by the Government of Senegal to bridge those divisions. Initiatives planned by the Dakar-based Friends of the Casamance group, comprising United Nations agencies, donors and non-governmental organizations, for providing additional resources for economic and social development in the area, could provide impetus for the implementation of the agreements and consolidating peace. Concerns were expressed concerning the impact of continuing religious and ethnic strife in Nigeria and the importance of providing support to help ensure the success of the country's nascent democracy was stressed. Additionally, while armed rebellions in northern Mali and the Niger have been resolved, concerns remain regarding the possible resurgence of security threats in the Sahara strip from northern Mali and northern Niger to Chad, mainly because of the unresolved problems of reintegration and development.

19. The victims of modern-day conflicts in West Africa have been predominantly civilians. Child soldiers have been used by all sides and special attention needs to be paid to their rehabilitation. Aid workers have become targets of attacks by rebel forces. In the conflict in the Mano River Union countries all sides have used and continue to use mercenaries.

20. An issue frequently stressed to the Mission was the repercussion of ineffective demobilization and reintegration programmes following the disarmament of former combatants. Of particular concern are the large numbers of former combatants from the Liberian civil conflict, which came to an end in July 1997 following the elections. They did not receive adequate reintegration assistance, and have largely remained unemployed, posing a security problem both within Liberia and for the subregion as, lacking other opportunities, many have resorted to banditry or are involved in mercenary activities. An urgent situation exists in Guinea-Bissau, where 12,000 former combatants remain within the national army, awaiting the execution of a comprehensive and effective demobilization and reintegration programme.

21. A vicious circle has been created between armed conflict and the proliferation of arms with a mutually reinforcing effect. It is estimated that more than half of an estimated 5 million illicit weapons that circulate in West Africa are used in activities such as internal insurgencies, armed robberies, drug trafficking and illegal diamond smuggling. Small arms are readily and cheaply available in West Africa. Their use has exacerbated a spiral of violence, obstructing conflict resolution, peace-building and sustained economic and social recovery in West Africa.

22. In an effort to address the scourge of small arms in West Africa, in October 1998, ECOWAS heads of State signed a three-year renewable Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa. To assist ECOWAS in the realization of the objectives of the Moratorium, UNDP established the Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development. It operates within the framework of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, at Lomé.

23. In the Mission's view, greater effort and resources are needed to investigate the dynamics of arms flows in West Africa. There is widespread concern about the volume and sophistication of arms in private hands that are being illegally imported into the subregion and the concomitant increase in the rate of violent crimes in many West African countries. The report of the Panel of Experts on Sierra Leone Diamonds and Arms is a very useful first step. Similar initiatives are needed to gain a better appreciation of the dimensions of the problem throughout the subregion and to promote accountability of those involved in illicit arms trafficking.

24. There was a movement towards democratization during the 1990s throughout the subregion, which had varying degrees of success in different countries. Notable progress has been made in this area which underpins political stability. Many new political parties and groupings emerged and large numbers of people have participated in multi-party elections. However, in several countries, conflict between Governments and opposition parties remains a serious obstacle to durable peace and stability. Meanwhile, in several countries the effective functioning of parliaments and parties is limited by the inexperience of representatives and lack of capacity and resources. A significant development at the subregional level was the recent establishment by ECOWAS of a 120-member Community Parliament and a Community Court of Justice.

25. The problems associated with weak governance were identified as issues of major concern by interlocutors throughout the subregion. It was acknowledged that many Governments had formulated programmes to address a range of governance-related issues, often in cooperation with the United Nations, bilateral donors and some non-governmental organizations. Little progress has been made, however, on such issues as combating corruption, building institutional capacity, promoting inclusive political processes and popular participation, as well as decentralization and strengthening the judiciary and rule of law and respect for human rights. Considerable international assistance and support is needed to help improve governance practices.

2. ECOWAS initiatives

26. In 1999, ECOWAS adopted the Protocol on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, which provided for the creation of several organs including the Mediation and Security Council, the Council of Elders and a department in the secretariat charged with responsibility for peace and security issues. The Mediation and Security Council has met several times at the ambassadorial, ministerial and summit levels, including on the situations in Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and the border area between Guinea and Liberia. The Mechanism also provides for the creation of an early warning centre and situation room at the secretariat in Abuja. This will be linked to observation centres with zonal headquarters in Benin, Burkina Faso, the Gambia and Liberia, which will monitor political, social and economic developments throughout the subregion. These centres are in the process of being set up. Interlocutors noted that international assistance would be required to improve the early warning capacity of the secretariat and that cooperation between the United Nations and the Mechanism should be enhanced considerably to help ensure that it becomes fully operational.

27. Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger, Senegal and Togo are bound by the Accord de non-aggression et d'assistance en matière de défense (ANAD) which was signed in 1977. It has had some success in promoting peaceful relations among its signatories. A process is now under way to implement the decision made in 1999 by the ECOWAS heads of State for ANAD to be harmonized with and absorbed into ECOWAS.

28. An important and innovative element of ECOWAS initiatives within the past decade to enhance peace and security in the subregion has been its deployment of peacekeeping forces to several of its member States where conflict had broken out. Between 1990 and 1997, the Monitoring Group of ECOWAS (ECOMOG) undertook a peace maintenance operation in Liberia and it has been generally credited with playing a vital role in the peace process that brought the eight-year civil conflict to an end. ECOMOG was also deployed in Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone. The possible deployment of an interposition force along the borders between Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone to help prevent the armed incursions occurring in the area remains under active consideration by ECOWAS.

29. However, in carrying out peacekeeping operations, ECOWAS is severely hampered by lack of financial resources and secretariat capacity to plan, monitor, direct and sustain a force in the field. Other problems include the lack of funds to organize, maintain and effectively run peacekeeping training institutions that it has established. ECOWAS countries, therefore, urgently need international assistance for the provision of technical assistance and operational equipment for fielding troops both for ECOMOG and for United Nations peacekeeping missions. Government officials also need to be fully informed about United Nations policies and procedures regarding peacekeeping operations, particularly those regarding reimbursement for troops and wet and dry lease arrangements for equipment.

30. It was stressed to the Mission that the political will exists among ECOWAS member States to help contribute towards peacekeeping both through ECOMOG or within United Nations peacekeeping operations. They felt that, particularly for operations within the region, West African troops were at an advantage, being familiar with the culture, terrain, climate and a number of other factors. However, lack of equipment, training, logistical and technical capacities were major inhibiting factors. It was felt that the United Nations could do much more to help countries in the subregion which were willing to contribute troops to fulfil such shortfalls in requirements. Several interlocutors stressed the considerable economic strain that was placed on West African troop-contributing countries and argued that

those Governments should not have to use their own, already meagre resources, for equipping troops for peacekeeping operations.

31. With regard to the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) several interlocutors indicated that, in view of the exigencies of the situation, the force's mandate should be changed to peace enforcement. While the need for UNAMSIL to deploy in strength into RUF-occupied areas in Sierra Leone was generally acknowledged, the perceived slowness in the further deployment of the force throughout the country was widely criticized.

3. Civil society initiatives

32. It was reaffirmed to the Mission that representatives of civil society, often frustrated by their perceived lack of power, are increasingly looking to the United Nations, the international community, and regional and subregional organizations for assistance and partnerships to strengthen their ability to undertake conflict prevention and resolution measures in their own countries or areas. In some cases they have adopted effective, multi-dimensional, coordinated and regional collaborative approaches which build on the use of local, national and regional resources including traditional leaders and social networks. This is aptly demonstrated by the Mano River Union Women's Peace Network, which links women from Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, working at various levels, to promote peace in the area. Network representatives have recently met with the heads of State of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia to urge them to work together to resolve the conflict in the Mano River Union area. At the community level, a variety of initiatives are under way, often using traditional cultural links, aimed at cultivating a culture of peace.

33. Cooperation between intergovernmental organizations within the subregion with civil society organizations in the areas of conflict prevention and management remains limited and could be strengthened considerably. However, many of these organizations remain in great need of international assistance to increase their effectiveness which is often limited by factors such as lack of resources and institutional capacity. In this regard, the Economic Commission for Africa, as part of the Mano River Basin initiative which it is leading, is developing a project which would provide support to civil society initiatives aimed at promoting peace and security within the Mano River Union member countries.

B. Human rights issues

34. The Mission found that reports of violations of human rights were widespread within the subregion. Such violations ranged from the broader rights of peoples to peace, security and development to abuses against the rights of individuals. Human rights defenders and members of opposition parties in several countries have often been victims of arbitrary arrest, unfair trials, torture and extrajudicial executions, or are often forced to exile. While there are a number of political parties, exercise of the right to demonstrate is often met by disproportionate use of force by security forces. The problems of mercenary activities, especially in conflicts in the Mano River Union countries, need to be addressed. Non-state entities, including the business sector, must be held accountable for illicit activities related to areas of conflict, including arms trafficking and mineral resources smuggling.

35. The importance of ensuring human rights protection at all times, including during periods of political transition and conflict situations, was recognized. In this regard, the situation at the border between Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia, including the lack of access to the population and large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons, is a matter of grave concern.

36. The need to ensure that there is no impunity for human rights violations was raised by several interlocutors. Particular reference was made to the need for truth and justice in Sierra Leone, as part of a national reconciliation process, in view of the atrocities against civilians that had, and continue to be, perpetrated there, particularly by RUF, during the decade-long conflict. In this regard, the decision to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the prospect of the establishment of the Special Court are welcome. However, the confusion about who might be prosecuted by the Court and the delays that might be caused by the decision to fund it through voluntary contributions were voiced as issues of concern.

37. With regard to some country-specific situations, the international commission of inquiry for Côte d'Ivoire, which the Secretary-General was requested by

the Government of Côte d'Ivoire to establish, to investigate human rights violations, including mass extrajudicial executions, during the presidential elections in October 2000 started its work in February 2000. The absence of institutional measures to address the issue of truth and justice in Liberia is still considered by many to be a major handicap in the country's transition to democracy and the rule of law.

38. Ethnicity, religion and citizenship have been issues behind recent conflicts in several countries. This has been the case in Nigeria, following the proclamation of sharia law in several northern states. Also, serious incidents of communal violence have occurred in Lagos and elsewhere. In Côte d'Ivoire, the concept of *ivoirite* has been perceived by many, especially Muslims and people from northern parts of the country, as an attempt to deny their right to citizenship and participation in public life, raising the spectre of ethnic and internal tensions. Violence against foreigners has provoked the return of many West Africans to their countries of origin, with consequences for security and stability within the subregion.

39. The difficult situation in several West African countries means that numerous groups of people are particularly vulnerable to human rights violations, including internally displaced persons, ethnic or religious minorities, refugees, women and children. Thus far the rights of victims of human rights violations during armed conflicts or political transitions have not been adequately addressed. Child soldiers are still being actively recruited for armed conflict. For children in certain areas, there is only limited protection against trafficking and sexual abuse and the number of homeless children is increasing. Despite growing awareness, violence against women, especially in armed conflicts, continues unabated as many are subjected to sexual slavery, torture and domestic violence and forced into prostitution. In the field of economic and social rights, particular attention was drawn to the lack of access to adequate education, employment and health care in the subregion. This is a particular problem for young people, who, lacking education and employment opportunities, may be drawn towards making a living through illicit activities.

40. The six major United Nations human rights treaties as well as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights have been ratified by most of the countries in the subregion. In practice, the implementation of these standards has been lacking, however. Many Governments have difficulty in meeting the reporting obligations to international supervisory committees on the measures taken to give effect to the provisions of human rights treaties to which they are parties. In addition, human rights education remains weak and does not take fully into account positive traditional values.

C. Economic development and regional cooperation

41. The economies of the countries of West Africa are generally very fragile and in some cases are continuing to deteriorate. This is the situation despite the abundant natural resource endowments which could be harnessed to spur economic growth. Within the subregion, the States members of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, the Niger, Senegal and Togo) have outperformed the other ECOWAS countries, with an average growth rate of some 5 per cent over the past 10 years. The repercussions of the decline in economic performance in the past year in Côte d'Ivoire, which normally constitutes 40 per cent of the combined economic activity of UEMOA countries, continues to be felt in countries throughout the subregion. Contributory factors include the departure from Côte d'Ivoire of thousands of workers from other West African countries and the reduced free circulation of goods and people.

42. The reduction in the price of many export commodities from West African countries in recent years and their high debt service obligations were also noted as factors contributing to the economic decline. Decreased import revenues have reduced the resources available for development projects. For example, interlocutors in Guinea-Bissau expressed concern about the 40 per cent drop in the world market price of cashew nuts, the main export commodity. In Togo similar concerns were expressed regarding the price of phosphates.

43. The issue of the external debt burden was raised as a major concern by both government and non-governmental interlocutors. It was noted, for example, that the total eternal debt of Nigeria, at some $40 billion, is almost identical to its gross domestic product (GDP). In Guinea-Bissau, the external debt stands at more than 100 per cent of GDP. The ECOWAS member

countries devote an average of between 20 and 60 per cent of export revenues to external debt servicing. In that context, interlocutors in most of the countries visited viewed the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) programme as a useful initiative. Several felt that the programme should reduce debt servicing obligations substantially, so as to release resources for economic and social development. In Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Nigeria it was particularly stressed that, without considerable assistance from the international community, including savings from the HIPC programme, progress towards democratization would be undermined and democratic systems in place would be threatened or at risk.

44. The subregional economic growth rate has lagged behind the rate of population growth in past years, with little to indicate that the situation will improve in the near future, so that already high poverty levels are likely to worsen. This is the case across the subregion, from Côte d'Ivoire, where 18 per cent of the population is living below the poverty line, to Guinea-Bissau, where more than 80 per cent of the population lives in poverty. The other indicators of social and economic development, such as access to basic social services including education, health services and potable water, have also been severely constrained by the lack of economic growth. The situation is even worse in countries which have recently emerged from wars or in which conflict continues. They are among the countries in the world with the least capacity to provide their citizens with access to basic services. For example, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone are among the 10 countries at the bottom of the UNDP Human Development Index, a composite measure of life expectancy and access to basic health and educational services. Optimism was expressed by several interlocutors, both within and outside Government, that the economic situation would improve in the near future. However, both state and non-state actors must exhibit considerable political will and commitment to implement reforms and initiatives if the declining trends are to be arrested.

45. The serious problems associated with high rates of unemployment in West African countries, in particular youth unemployment, was generally stressed to the Mission. This is viewed as a major factor contributing to instability. It was noted that the informal sector, which continues to flourish, is the main source of current employment and is the area which holds the strongest potential for future job creation.

46. The causes of persistent economic stagnation and the attendant increase in poverty and unemployment levels are numerous and interrelated. The Mission noted three factors of particular importance, the first being the issue of governance and internal national political dynamics. Prospects for economic growth are generally higher in countries with more open and participatory democratic systems, in large measure because of the establishment of environments conducive to business. For example, despite some current difficulties in the economic and social areas, Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal exemplify this commitment to democratization and its corresponding economic benefits. Conversely, inconclusive and protracted political transitions, such as those taking place in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau, in several ways negatively affect prospects for stability and economic growth. In Liberia and Togo, lack of political dialogue between the Government and opposition parties, problems of bad governance and human rights problems which have led to the suspension of economic assistance by some donors have further worsened prospects for economic growth in the near term.

47. A second factor is the weak institutional capacity of most of the countries in the subregion. Most lack qualified human resources and policy tools to respond appropriately and in a timely manner to changing domestic and international circumstances. Donors have made important contributions to efforts to address some of these capacity issues. A number of government and civil society interlocutors pointed out the failure of structural adjustment programmes in reducing poverty and spurring economic growth. Consequently, alternative and complementary programmes were being explored, such as the poverty reduction strategies sponsored by the World Bank and other partner-supported programmes in governance and capacity-building.

48. The civil conflicts in several West African countries constitute the third major factor constraining economic growth and development. Years of civil war in Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone have resulted in widespread destruction of social, economic and physical infrastructure, the departure of many skilled personnel, problems concerning control over natural resources etc., so that capacity for economic recovery has been drastically reduced. The importance

of adequate international resources to assist such countries to recover was mentioned by many interlocutors. Without adequate intervention, the spiral of instability in those countries, resulting from fragile political institutions and weak economic growth, was seen as likely to continue, with contagious effects throughout the subregion.

49. The ECOWAS countries have shown resilience in the face of the difficulties outlined, giving cause for some optimism. Individually, through country-based mechanisms, and collectively through subregional mechanisms, particularly under the auspices of ECOWAS and UEMOA, efforts are being made to redress the situation. Regarding the country mechanisms, a commitment by the Governments of the Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria and Senegal to implementing economic stabilization and reform programmes necessary to facilitate economic growth is manifest. Several interlocutors underscored the importance of strengthening democracy, transparency by government, political dialogue, and good governance if further economic decline is to be halted.

50. A number of interlocutors expressed concern that demands being made by international financial institutions on the Government of Guinea-Bissau to undertake fiscal reforms, combined with other factors, could contribute to destabilizing the country unless special efforts were made to simultaneously provide support to address the mounting internal debt accumulation and a comprehensive disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. Similar concerns were expressed concerning demands being made on the Governments of Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. Several interlocutors felt that, while political dialogue and respect for human rights in Côte d'Ivoire should be encouraged, protracted delays in resuming economic assistance might result in the unravelling of the country's economy, with grave implications for the subregion. A holistic approach was called for which simultaneously addressed the issue of political dialogue, inclusion, security and stability as well as economic support.

51. ECOWAS and UEMOA provide a framework of mechanisms relating to the economic and social spheres. These mechanisms aim to reinforce subregional cooperation and integration and cover issues including a common currency, freedom of movement, trade, transport, agriculture and energy and also security and defence, and the eventual emergence of ECOWAS as the pre-eminent subregional organization. Several interlocutors saw the implementation of ECOWAS integration plans as one of the surest ways to improve economic growth in the subregion, improving the ability of West African countries to effectively compete in the world market and benefit from globalization.

52. In articulating the ideas of regional integration and the mechanisms for its advancement, it was widely felt that UEMOA, the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) and other subregional entities should become specialized centres within the umbrella of ECOWAS. They were seen as becoming complementary poles of expertise to provide specific services to ECOWAS. This arrangement could further accelerate the integration of the countries in the subregion and existing institutions within the ECOWAS secretariat.

53. It was affirmed to the Mission that ECOWAS had made considerable progress towards the abolition of visas and the establishment of borderless zones. The two-track approach to currency convergence, which is scheduled to permit the adoption by Ghana and Nigeria of a common currency by the end of next year, and to make it possible for the whole subregion to do the same by the end of 2004, has made considerable progress. Institutions have been set up in the subregion to address aspects of these critical issues on which discussions are continuing between ECOWAS, UEMOA and other partners. ECOWAS has also launched sector initiatives covering transnational roads, the establishment of a power pool and a gas pipeline linking Nigeria, Benin, Togo and Ghana, as well as a common agricultural policy.

54. The weaknesses of the existing subregional mechanisms, particularly regarding capacity and financial and human resources, were acknowledged. The need for cooperation among donors, both bilateral and multilateral, across sectors and subregionally, to provide adequate support to the ECOWAS secretariat and its integration mechanisms was stressed. Currently, donor response to the subregion, including that of the United Nations system and the World Bank, was seen as mainly country focused, delivered through a range of bilateral and multilateral support programmes, with very limited regional interventions.

55. The European Union's regional programmes were welcomed and collaboration among donors in such

efforts across sectors and in collaboration with ECOWAS was urged. In this regard, the new initiatives by the World Bank, the African Development Bank and USAID to implement regional strategies in the subregion were well received and encouraged. It was conveyed to the Mission that support for regional cooperation and integration and the strengthening of ECOWAS institutional capacity is critical to assist the subregion to better deal with the challenges of globalization in a rapidly changing world. A movement from the current country-focused approach, even in the implementation of subregional and bilateral programmes, to a subregional approach was generally urged, given the need for ECOWAS to be the main engine of growth and stability in West Africa.

D. Humanitarian issues

1. Refugees, internally displaced persons and population movements

56. Just over a decade ago, West Africa was a markedly different place. There were about 20,000 refugees and a negligible number of internally displaced persons. Today the situation is very different. There are well over half a million refugees and over 670,000 internally displaced persons, all victims of conflict in the subregion. The political and social landscape, in particular that of the three Mano River Union countries, is characterized by instability. Out of a population of approximately 15 million people in those countries, over 1.1 million are either internally displaced persons or refugees. Sadly, all signs suggest that, without concerted efforts to resolve what are deepening rifts in the area, further deterioration is more than likely to happen. Guinea, which is generously hosting around 420,000 refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone, some for over a decade, has recently become embroiled in conflict with Liberia, a situation that has resulted in the displacement of 150,000 of its own citizens.

57. The refugee caseload in Guinea constitutes approximately 10 per cent of that country's population. Sierra Leone hosts 6,000 Liberian refugees and 500,000 internally displaced persons, while Liberia hosts 70,000 refugees from Sierra Leone and 20,000 internally displaced persons. The 17-year-old conflict in the Casamance area of Senegal continues to threaten the stability of both Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, and has itself produced over 41,000 internally displaced persons. Landmines in both Casamance and Guinea-Bissau will prove a long-term hazard for civilians. Senegal, while attempting to cope with the needs of its own conflict-affected citizens, is making contingency plans for possible refugee flows from Guinea, if the conflict continues to spread. Additionally, Guinea-Bissau is beginning to see an inflow of Sierra Leonean refugees from Guinea. While the Mission was aware that the potential for a massive complex emergency, not unlike that which is consuming the Great Lakes region, has heightened significantly over the last six months, the urgency of this situation was widely and repeatedly stressed by the Mission's interlocutors.

58. Until recently, refugees in the subregion have been relatively sure that they could depend upon some degree of protection from their hosts, with many of whom they share ethnic affinities. As the political tension has heightened between specific leaders, the subregion is experiencing not only donor fatigue but also host fatigue, which is emerging as tensions have mounted within host communities that have often shared their resources with refugees over the past decade. Host communities are also aware of the dangers of armed elements within their midst who have infiltrated the refugee communities and put both host and refugee communities at risk.

59. Insecurity has, in a number of areas, severely constrained humanitarian operations. In the "parrot's beak" area of Guinea, lack of humanitarian access has dramatically affected over 180,000 Sierra Leonean refugees, 10,000 internally displaced persons and 60,000 civilians who are trapped and stranded with few prospects for resettlement. Delivery of food and basic supplies is proving exceedingly difficult. Targeting of refugees by armed elements has led to many moving from that area to Sierra Leone and further north into Guinea. Protection of refugees and internally displaced persons poses a major challenge for the humanitarian community. Allegations of human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law by armed actors, the targeting of civilians, widespread looting of food and belongings, the use of child soldiers, forced conscription, the use of civilians as human shields, all characterize the situation. A climate of impunity prevails as the rights of refugees and internally displaced persons are often violated. Armed groups have also targeted humanitarian workers, through hostage-taking and the recent killing of humanitarian personnel.

60. In recognition of these threats, UNHCR has recently called for "safe corridors" to enable refugees and internally displaced persons to flee the combat areas to safety further north. Improving the physical protection of refugees started by agreeing with the Guinean authorities upon the necessity of ensuring "safe access" and the "safe passage" of refugees entangled in the war-torn areas of Guinea in order to relocate them in safer areas of the country and provide food and other basic assistance.

61. Internally displaced persons are also badly in need of assistance. This was starkly apparent when the Mission visited Pamelap in Guinea, once a rich and dynamic town on the border with Sierra Leone, where attacks by armed elements from Sierra Leone in recent months have resulted in most of the residents fleeing and the destruction of a great deal of property.

62. The Mission noted that most assistance to Liberian refugees had been discontinued in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Guinea despite the fact that many refugees have been compelled to remain in their host countries because of insecurity and the absence of a conducive environment for their return. As these refugees receive very limited assistance, they are competing with the host communities for scant resources and have thus placed an enormous burden on host Governments. Government officials in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana illustrated for the Mission how this has aggravated an already fragile situation and has led, in many instances, to security problems.

63. This lack of support for protracted refugee caseloads poses what is a perceptible crisis of conscience for humanitarian workers and creates a sense of inequity in the camps that could contribute to future problems. Of concern, in this regard, is the possible recruitment of young refugees by rebel groups, increased criminality among refugees, and participation of some refugees in weapons trafficking or other illegal smuggling, which could prove very difficult and expensive to address in the long term.

2. HIV/AIDS pandemic

64. The HIV/AIDS pandemic poses a serious threat to the development of Africa south of the Sahara. Nearly 25 million Africans are living with HIV/AIDS while another 14 million have already died from AIDS. The consequences of HIV/AIDS in the social and economic spheres have been devastating, as much of the progress made in those areas in recent decades has been severely undermined, or shattered. The movements of people across borders as a result of massive displacements contributes to the spread of the disease, and easily renders preventive measures ineffective, particularly as over 80 per cent of those infected are unaware that they are carriers.

65. In West Africa, prevalence rates have been increasing in some of the larger countries. Côte d'Ivoire is already among the 15 worst-affected countries in the world and the epicentre of the epidemic in the subregion, with an adult prevalence rate of close to 11 per cent. In Nigeria, over 5 per cent of all adults have HIV, and in Ghana the infection rate among the adult population is 3.6 per cent. The impact of conflict in countries like Sierra Leone poses a particular threat, in terms of a further spread of the epidemic. In Sierra Leone, the adult prevalence is currently close to 3 per cent. The prevalence rate in other West African countries remains below 3 per cent. In Senegal, government commitment to combating AIDS, including through public awareness campaigns which involve a wide range of national partners, has helped to slow the spread of the disease.

3. Problems in the delivery of social services and humanitarian assistance

66. In many countries an already overburdened capacity to deliver social services is further stretched by the persistent deterioration of living conditions in rural areas, and an increase in urban poverty which creates new problems in a resource-constrained environment. Because of the economic crisis and decreased job opportunities, self-employment, which has been the most promising social adjustment response along with the coping strategies of the traditional culture, appears to have reached its limits. The safety net constituted by family and neighbourhood patterns of solidarity no longer prevails. As a result, vulnerable social groups, including female-headed households, children and the elderly, have been forced to make a living in often hostile environments plagued by crime, political unrest, social violence and declining social services.

67. The consequences have been devastating and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future, if political will and initiative do not walk hand in hand with humanitarian assistance and targeted economic and social development programmes that can turn the tide

of violence in countries in crisis in the subregion. In this regard, the Mission noted with concern the following issues:

- Weak coordination between humanitarian agencies, government authorities and peacekeeping operations.
- Lack of adequate resources and appropriate programmes that could be rapidly put in place to stabilize post-conflict situations by efficiently bridging the gap between the end of emergency relief and the beginning of development assistance.
- Lack of a proper strategy by United Nations humanitarian agencies to develop the institutional capacity of local non-governmental organizations, particularly in the management of emergency situations.
- The poor interaction between international and national non-governmental organizations in complex emergency operations such as in Guinea.

68. In meetings with representatives of Governments and civil society as well as with refugees, the Mission's attention was repeatedly drawn to the stark disparities between the relatively meagre assistance provided for humanitarian emergencies in Africa and the largesse generated for such emergencies in Europe. A sense of cynicism prevailed about the goodwill of the international community towards helping solve the critical structural problems and ensuring that the gap between emergency relief and development is closed.

IV. Assessment and recommendations

69. One of the principal messages conveyed to the Inter-Agency Mission to West Africa, by heads of State and a range of other governmental and non-governmental interlocutors, was that greater subregional integration in the political, security, economic and social spheres, with ECOWAS as the main engine for the process, is a prime factor in addressing the priority needs and challenges of the subregion. There was a concerted call for international partners to provide substantial assistance to ECOWAS activities and initiatives in those spheres. Furthermore, it was recommended that such assistance should be a central focus in their policy, strategy, institutional arrangements and programmes in West Africa, through a holistic and well-coordinated approach. Several interlocutors expressed the view that the United Nations, as an impartial and objective actor, was the most appropriate organization to effectively mobilize the international community to work with the countries of the subregion in promoting integration.

70. The linkages that exist between peoples and communities in West African countries and the porous nature of borders have resulted in a long tradition of free movement and settlement of people across national frontiers. This is particularly prevalent in areas where people of the same ethnic groups are artificially divided by borders. ECOWAS agreements that allow for the free movement of West African citizens within the subregion without visa requirements have reinforced this trend.

71. In the past two decades, in particular, factors such as conflicts and political instability have precipitated large movements of people from one country to another and also caused significant numbers to become internally displaced. As a result, enormous pressures have come to bear on communities' facilities, infrastructure and the environment in a number of countries, straining their resources as they struggle to cope with the situation.

72. These phenomena have created new, and often conflicting, political security and human development dynamics and precipitated serious security problems and humanitarian crises in several countries. These problems, together with those of economic development and integration, transcend national boundaries, affecting the entire subregion, with the result that national programmes and sectoral approaches have proved inadequate in mitigating them and bringing about durable solutions. An integrated subregional approach by the international community has therefore become urgently needed to help prevent the further emergence of conflicts, restore peace and stability and promote economic and social development. This was reinforced by many of the Mission's interlocutors who stressed the importance of the United Nations and international partners developing such a subregional approach to addressing the priority needs and challenges facing West Africa.

A. A United Nations response

73. Integrated, multifaceted approaches are emphasized in the programmes of various United Nations agencies and their relevance has been

reinforced in the report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa (A/52/871-S/1998/318) and the Millennium Declaration and by various global conferences organized by the United Nations.

74. Several agencies, operational funds and programmes within the United Nations system already use integrated programming approaches in implementing national and subregional programmes. This approach has been facilitated by the decentralized presence in West Africa of a number of United Nations agencies, departments and programmes. For example, the regional offices of key humanitarian actors such as UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF were able to rapidly identify the needs and obstacles and respond quickly, and in a concerted manner, to the crisis in the Guinea border area when it began in September 2000.

75. In another example of an integrated subregional initiative, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in response to the grave dimensions of the humanitarian crisis in the subregion, launched in 2001 its first subregional United Nations Inter-Agency Appeal for West Africa, which addresses needs in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Humanitarian intervention is in the sectors of nutrition, health, protection, water and sanitation, and education. The Appeal does not only target refugees and internally displaced persons, but has also taken an innovative position with regard to assistance to host communities and contingency planning for future crises. Flexibility has also been built into the Appeal to ensure that regional managers can redirect resources from one country to the other or from one activity to another, according to need. The principle of the Appeal is that resources should follow and meet the needs of beneficiaries wherever they are.

76. The development and implementation by the United Nations system of a fully integrated, comprehensive and broad-based subregional approach to addressing the multifaceted problems and challenges being faced in West Africa, as proposed by the Mission, has a number of implications, particularly regarding strategy and policy setting, institutional arrangements and programme activities, for both the United Nations and its partners.

B. Strategy and policy setting

77. It is the Mission's view that the different strategy and policy-setting mechanisms of the United Nations system, in particular those of the agencies operating within the subregion, should be streamlined to enhance capacity for developing and implementing national and subregional strategies and policies. These approaches, policies and strategies should be developed and implemented in partnership with ECOWAS.

Recommendations

- **A mechanism for systematic and regular consultations among entities of the United Nations system for defining and harmonizing national and subregional policies and strategies should be established. Both national and subregional concerns should be reflected in programming strategies to facilitate holistic programme development.**
- **In addition to Governments, United Nations agencies, departments and programmes in the subregion should consult more fully with ECOWAS and other subregional organizations, international and national partners and civil society in developing cohesive strategies.**

C. Institutional arrangements and mechanisms

78. Effective implementation of a subregional strategy requires the enhancement of working arrangements within the United Nations system at the subregional level. In this regard, a system of collaborative mechanisms and periodic consultations should be formalized.

79. It was evident to the Mission that the United Nations urgently needs to enhance its capacity to continuously monitor and to influence the political, security, economic and social situations in West Africa. In this context, the United Nations should further develop frameworks and institutional arrangements that would allow it to intensify its collaboration with ECOWAS and other major actors in the subregion with regard to conflict resolution and management and in addressing other major issues.

Recommendations

1. United Nations office for West Africa

- **To enhance United Nations capacity and collaboration in the subregion, and to complement existing activities, a United Nations office for West Africa should be established. The office, to be headed by a Special Representative of the Secretary-General, would have the following main functions:**
  - **Assisting Headquarters and subregional offices of the United Nations system in setting integrated policies and strategies for activities in West Africa;**
  - **Monitoring and reporting on political, security, human rights, humanitarian and development issues in the subregion;**
  - **Ensuring harmonization of United Nations system activities in the political, security, human rights, humanitarian and development areas with those of ECOWAS and other subregional and relevant organizations, focused on addressing priority needs and challenges in the subregion, as identified by the United Nations, ECOWAS and other relevant organizations;**
  - **Monitoring and supporting the relevant decisions and activities of ECOWAS and other subregional organizations;**
  - **Lending support to national and subregional peace-building efforts and promoting the integration of a conflict prevention dimension in national and subregional activities.**

2. Integrated mission task force

- **The Secretary-General's Inter-Agency Task Force on the West African Subregion at Headquarters should be transformed into an integrated mission task force on West Africa. The integrated mission task force, which will be discontinued once the West Africa office has become operational, would focus on implementation of key recommendations in this and other related reports and work closely with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and backstop the activities of his or her office at the beginning of its operations.**

D. Programming approach

80. A more fully integrated and broad-based subregional approach by the United Nations system should emphasize programming strategies undertaken in partnership with subregional organizations, Governments, international partners, non-governmental organizations and civil society groups. Common frameworks should be developed bringing together the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, in a unified approach at both the national and subregional levels. The protocols of collaboration and memoranda of understanding already existing between some agencies represent a positive step in that direction. The various country level United Nations development assistance frameworks, common country assessments and poverty reduction strategy papers should be harmonized and should form the basis for developing a subregional approach. Harmonization and coordination need to be a prime focus in collaboration between all agencies.

81. United Nations country teams, Governments and development partners should strive to work together through collaborative processes such as the development assistance frameworks, at the national and subregional level, so as to facilitate the development of complementary and comprehensive programmes. United Nations country teams should involve all partners in the preparation of common country assessments and in the preparation of the national frameworks. Subregional offices, working with partners, should prepare common subregional strategies and frameworks, preferably based on existing instruments such as the consolidated appeal, common country assessments and development assistance frameworks.

Recommendations

- **Consideration should be given to the development of a subregional United Nations development assistance framework that would particularly target issues of a cross-border nature. This umbrella subregional development assistance framework should complement national common country assessments and development assistance frameworks.**
- **Steps should be taken to ensure complementarity in national development assistance frameworks, common country assessments and poverty**

reduction strategy papers when dealing with common cross-border issues and priority areas so that they form the basis for developing a subregional development assistance framework.

- **The subregional development assistance framework should include a plan for strategic peace-building and recovery activities, which should serve for the mobilization of resources.**
- **The United Nations office for West Africa should coordinate the development of a subregional development assistance framework.**
- **Steps should be taken to ensure that country teams, operating in countries where unstable political and security conditions persist, are strong and appropriately staffed. The Resident Coordinator unit should be reinforced to ensure strong leadership and coordination.**

E. Specific issues

82. The Mission's further recommendations for action relate to specific issues within the following general areas: peace and security; governance and human rights; humanitarian assistance; and economic development and regional integration.

1. Peace and security

(a) Conflicts in the Mano River Union area

83. The situation in Sierra Leone and its effects on Liberia and Guinea, including the border areas between the three countries, is a core issue in the general framework of peace and security in West Africa. Most interlocutors stressed that achieving a peaceful resolution of the conflict in the Mano River Union countries is crucial in any approach aimed at addressing priority needs and challenges in the subregion.

84. The difficulties and uncertainties of the situation in Sierra Leone were apparent from the discussions that the Mission held there. The six-month extension of the mandate of the Government of Sierra Leone provided by Parliament will terminate in September 2001. Meanwhile, the prospects for successfully holding elections in December 2001, as proposed by President Kabbah, and the legitimacy of the elected candidate remains uncertain while RUF still occupies a significant part of the country's territory and around half the population are refugees or internally displaced. Furthermore, the preparations for the elections will need to be urgently expedited if the proposed date is to be met. It is the Mission's view that presidential and legislative elections should be planned and organized to ensure inclusive participation by all the political groupings, including RUF. However, it is unclear how much power the new political and military leadership of RUF is able to exert over the whole group, at a time when key decisions need to be made.

85. The deployment of UNAMSIL is still constrained by the availability of troops. Also, issues regarding its mandate as a peacekeeping or peace-enforcement operation continue to be the subject of discussion in the subregion. Meanwhile, it appears that the Government is increasingly looking towards abandoning the two-track approach and favouring a purely military option. Such a solution would be difficult to achieve, given the insufficient training and lack of combat experience of the Sierra Leone army, the unpredictability of RUF strength and the nature of guerrilla warfare in a highly forested country. Another question that remains to be answered is the future of the Lomé Peace Agreement: whether it will be resuscitated as a whole or partially. It is not clear whether the political aspects of the Agreement, such as power sharing and the transformation of RUF into a political party, can be reconciled with the fact that RUF has not respected the provisions of the Agreement and that many of its leaders are suspected of committing gross violations of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law. In addition, there is a need for truth, justice and accountability, if a process of national reconciliation is to succeed. Moreover, the possible further six-month extension of the mandate of the Government or, alternatively, the establishment of a transitional government until elections can be held are issues to be given due consideration.

86. The uncertainty in Sierra Leone is echoed by uncertainty in relations between Liberia and Guinea and the risk of the further spread of conflict within the Mano River Union countries. The alliance between the Guinean army and ULIMO-K has proved to be unpredictable and the indiscriminate bombing of border areas of northern Sierra Leone by Guinean forces has implications in terms of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sierra Leone and the effects of the bombing on the civilian population in that country. There is also

uncertainty about the fate of the large population of Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees, owing to difficulties in ensuring their safe return and in finding safe areas for their resettlement in Sierra Leone and Liberia. The reported recent flare-up of fighting in Lofa County on the northern border of Liberia with Guinea is an added source of concern.

87. In view of the nature of the conflict along the borders of the Mano River Union countries, the expansion of the mandate of UNAMSIL to cover Guinea and Liberia might need to be considered, particularly given the urgent need to place an interposition force along the border areas between the Mano River Union countries and ECOWAS plans to deploy such a force, and given the request by President Taylor for the deployment of a force to monitor the borders of Liberia and to verify compliance with the recent sanctions being proposed by the Security Council. This issue needs to be carefully considered by the appropriate departments of the United Nations Secretariat.

Recommendations

- **The United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone should maintain the two-track approach to the resolution of the Sierra Leone conflict.**
- **Consideration should be given to the possible consequences for the peace process of the plan of the Government of Sierra Leone to hold presidential and legislative elections in December 2001.**
- **Consideration should be given to the expansion of the mandate of UNAMSIL to cover the three Mano River Union countries to take into account the interrelations between the implementation of the Lomé Peace Agreement and implementation of United Nations sanctions on Liberia and the monitoring of the borders between the three countries.**
- **The three heads of State of the Mano River Union countries should continue to be urged to meet without further delay and devise ways to resolve the crisis peacefully.**
- **An international conference for the mobilization of donor support for Guinea should be convened as soon as possible to enable it to cope with the current humanitarian crisis, which is also posing a threat to its sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the country's political stability.**

(b) Conflict prevention and resolution

88. The political turmoil and civil conflicts in several West African countries and the potential for the rapid spread of instability within the subregion underlines the need for the development of a comprehensive approach which would focus, through a range of activities, on addressing the many interlinked root causes of these problems. Concerted international attention, support and assistance, combined with political will and determination by national actors to bring about peaceful change, could do much to turn the situation around.

89. It is the Mission's view that much more could be done to improve capacities within the subregion in the area of conflict prevention and resolution. In this regard, the proposed United Nations office for West Africa, which would improve the United Nations reporting and policy development capacity and enhance collaboration with ECOWAS, would play an important role. In particular, steps should be taken to assess the needs and identify the specific areas of collaboration between the United Nations and the ECOWAS secretariat in the area of early warning. Additionally, the strengthening of the capacity of the ECOWAS Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security would do much to enhance the organization's capacity to respond more effectively and provide the assistance necessary to prevent the emergence of further conflict or to bring about peaceful conflict resolution.

Recommendations*

- **The United Nations system and the international community should take steps to strengthen the ECOWAS Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security.**
- **Cooperation with the United Nations system should be enhanced for the development and implementation of the ECOWAS early**

* In addition to those made during the meeting between the United Nations and regional organizations held in New York in February 2001.

warning system including the central observer office and the zonal bureaux. Support should be given to enable the ECOWAS secretariat to provide logistical and technical electoral assistance to member States.

- **Support should be provided for the development of ECOWAS public outreach capacities.**
- **Greater support should be provided for civil society initiatives in the area of conflict prevention.**
- **To prevent the recurrence of conflict in Guinea-Bissau, where the political and security situation remains volatile, urgent financial and capacity-building assistance by international development partners, including the Bretton Woods institutions, is required. The United Nations (Department of Political Affairs) and UNDP should jointly organize a round-table donor conference to mobilize resources for Guinea-Bissau, as a follow-up to the one organized at Geneva in May 1999.**
- **A more active role should be played by the United Nations United Nations in ameliorating the relationship between Côte d'Ivoire and its neighbours.**

(c) National reconciliation

90. Lack of national reconciliation is a major cause of conditions of political instability and insecurity affecting several West African countries. It is, therefore, one of the priority challenges to be addressed within the framework of a subregional approach to the problems faced by the subregion.

91. In countries experiencing political instability, genuine dialogue between government leaders and opposition groups on a range of political, human rights, rule of law and socio-economic issues is often needed so that progress can be made towards democratization and implementation of good governance practices. Such dialogue will often necessitate compromises, particularly on the government side, so that a deterioration of the situation into civil conflict can be averted.

92. In Togo, for example, for a number of years, several factors, principally the one-party State culture and a lack of confidence between the ruling and opposition parties, have resulted in a lack of will on both sides to engage in meaningful dialogue. This meant that differences on a number of important issues, such as those necessary for the organization of presidential and legislative elections and other steps to improve governance practices, were not resolved. The resulting lack of progress led to several, often violent, crises erupting in the country in recent years. In this regard, mediation by the European Union, the international organization of La Francophonie and other organizations has been instrumental in paving the way for the presidential elections, which were held in June 1998, and the legislative elections scheduled for October 2001.

93. In Côte d'Ivoire , the policy of *ivoirité*, pursued by the Government of President Henri Konan Bedié, since it came into power early in 1994, has been a prime factor contributing to the division of the country along ethnic, religious and geographical lines and the political instability which led to that Government's overthrow by the military in December 1999. The policy, which also prevented the former Prime Minister, Alassane Ouatarra from contesting presidential elections in October 2000, has also strongly contributed to the instability during the transition from military to civilian rule. Pressure from the European Union, bilateral development partners and the international community has since helped pave the way for the national reconciliation efforts currently being undertaken by the Government and the opposition parties. The United Nations has repeatedly urged the Ivorian leadership to engage in genuine national dialogue.

94. In countries emerging from conflict, or where conflict is ongoing, the need for dialogue and national reconciliation is particularly pressing. This is evident in Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone, where such efforts are urgently needed if the necessary conditions for durable peace and stability are to be achieved.

95. Some West African countries have taken steps to resolve internal crises through a process of national reconciliation. The Governments of Mali and the Niger successfully resolved conflicts with Tuareg groups in the northern parts of their countries. The national reconciliation process involved reintegration programmes for former combatants, decentralization of governing structures and greater political inclusivity of representatives of the group so that there is greater

local autonomy. Democratization has also made particular progress in Benin, Cape Verde, Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal, where commendable efforts are being made to promote democratic governance as a foundation for peace and stability.

Recommendations

- **The proposed United Nations office for West Africa, in partnership with other entities of the United Nations system, ECOWAS and other international partners, should make national reconciliation an important part of a comprehensive approach towards the challenges facing the subregion.**
- **The United Nations should be more actively involved in activities aimed at promoting and supporting national reconciliation, as soon as early warning signs of a potential crisis in any West African country are evident.**
- **The United Nations should support and follow up on the efforts of national leaders, in particular those of Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone, to honour their commitments to reconciliation with opposition groups.**

(d) Peace-building

96. The need to improve capacity for preventive and post-conflict peace-building activities, in a cohesive and multidimensional manner, was frequently stressed to the Mission. To be truly effective, peace-building must be based on a cohesive and coordinated United Nations approach at the country and subregion levels, building on existing infrastructures and instruments. United Nations agencies and departments in the field need to establish appropriate mechanisms to link with the programming and analysis, concerning early warning and prevention measures, which are carried out at Headquarters.

97. Peace-building processes need to begin well before a particular conflict has subsided. Greater collaboration between Governments and their national and international partners, and more flexibility on financial conditionalities from those partners, are needed to address the many problems impeding the maintenance or restoration of peace and sustainable development. The capacity of Governments and subregional institutions needs to be strengthened to enable those bodies to contribute more effectively towards promoting peace and development.

Recommendations

- **Preventive and post-conflict peace-building measures should be among the primary activities of appropriate national and proposed subregional programmes, in particular the common country assessment, United Nations development assistance framework and consolidated appeal processes.**
- **International financial institutions should review their procedures concerning conditionalities related to financing arrangements for countries in transition, or where conflicts are ongoing, taking into account the range of problems such countries face.**
- **Particular emphasis should be placed on the political dimensions of peace-building as a tool for conflict prevention, including in those countries where there is no peace-building support office.**
- **In developing subregional peace-building programmes, there should be close collaboration with Governments, national and international partners and especially subregional institutions. The capacity of Governments and subregional institutions to develop and implement peace-building activities should be strengthened.**
- **In countries where the situation is particularly unstable, the common country assessment and development assistance framework processes should be flexibly adapted, as necessary, to meet the challenges of the situation. Representatives of all relevant United Nations agencies and departments should participate in a joint United Nations analysis and recovery plan.**

(e) Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration

98. A number of complaints were voiced over the failure of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes carried out in the subregion because of the inadequacy of the reintegration programmes. As a result of failure to provide sufficient integration assistance, many demobilized former

combatants had rearmed and regrouped into new militias or were resorting to banditry.

99. The view was widely held that many of these militias were supported by some state and non-state actors and are being used to destabilize Governments in some countries and to cause insecure conditions in certain areas in order to facilitate the illegal exploitation of mineral resources and conduct arms and drugs trafficking.

100. In countries where disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes are to be implemented, the reintegration aspects should feature as priority areas in joint analysis and recovery plans, common country assessments and development assistance frameworks, and form part of country-level programmes of United Nations agencies. To reinforce the effectiveness of reintegration, economic revitalization should be undertaken simultaneously in the country emerging from conflicts so as to provide prospects of employment and economic growth.

Recommendations

- **Owing to the zonal nature of conflicts in the subregion, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes should be conceived and implemented simultaneously in post-conflict situations in the countries affected by the conflicts and should involve all the parties concerned. Such zonal programmes would be particularly applicable to post-conflict situations in the Mano River Union countries and in the complex situation prevailing in Guinea-Bissau and the Casamance area of Senegal.**
- **Adequate and sustained funding should be provided for job training, job creation, counselling, rehabilitation and resettlement programmes for all ex-combatants.**
- **Support should also be provided to family members accompanying demobilized combatants as well as to the host communities.**
- **Reintegration aspects should feature as priority areas in any joint analysis and recovery plans, common country assessments and development assistance frameworks, and should form part of the country-level programmes of United Nations agencies.**
- **Special attention should be paid to economic revitalization programmes in countries emerging from conflict.**

(f) Stopping the proliferation of arms in the subregion

101. Widespread concern was expressed about the proliferation of small arms and new militia groups throughout the subregion. Existing mechanisms to monitor and to curtail the illegal flow of arms are grossly inadequate. Consideration should be urgently given to strengthening the capacity of ECOWAS, working with its member States, to monitor and curb the illegal flow of arms and the formation of militia groups. This should entail the better integration of mechanisms such as the Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development into ECOWAS and the establishment of additional complementary mechanisms.

102. Such mechanisms would need to focus on the supply as well as the recipient side of arms flows into the subregion. Those involved in the illicit arms trade need to be particularly targeted. States Members of the United Nations, in general, and members of the Security Council, in particular, should act individually and collectively to identify and prevent suppliers operating in their own countries from illegally supplying arms to actors in conflict areas. International agreements aimed at preventing illicit arms flows and prohibiting the use of mercenaries should be fully enforced. Sanctions or other appropriate measures should be applied against countries contravening the terms of these agreements.

Recommendations

- **The United Nations system and the international community should develop and adopt policies and activities aimed at strengthening the capacity of ECOWAS to monitor and curb the illegal flow of arms and the formation of militia groups.**
- **The Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development and other mechanisms aimed at stemming the flow of arms should be better integrated with ECOWAS. Adequate financial assistance should be provided to ECOWAS to that effect.**

- **Concerted measures should be taken by the appropriate United Nations organs, including the Security Council, and international and national partners to identify those engaged in the illicit trade of arms to West Africa and to stem their activities.**

- **Member States should ensure compliance with international agreements prohibiting the use of mercenaries. Consideration should be given to the imposition of sanctions against countries contravening such agreements.**

- **A self-enforced code of ethics concerning the activities of legitimate business operations in areas where conflicts are occurring should be developed.**

- **The United Nations should urge all States that are either maintaining or assisting militias to immediately end their support and disband them.**

(g) Ending the use of child soldiers

103. Children make obedient and cheap soldiers capable of instilling terror in civilians and opposing forces alike. Some are forced to fight while others volunteer, motivated by a desire to escape poverty. Adolescent youth in the throes of identity formation are particularly vulnerable to the lures of combat. Those who survive are often physically injured and psychologically scarred, having lost years of schooling and socialization.

104. Tens of thousands of children have, in contravention of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, had a direct role in the fighting in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Tens of thousands more have been displaced, lost one or both parents, or otherwise, been affected by the disruption and insecurity visited upon their young lives.

105. In conformity with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Accra Declaration on War-Affected Children in West Africa and the related Plan of Action, there is an urgent need for ECOWAS and the international community to (a) ensure that those who recruit and arm children or deliberately harm and target them are held accountable and do not profit from such actions; and (b) incorporate child rights and the protection of children in armed conflict into trading programmes for military forces and other security agencies.

Recommendations

- **State and non-state actors using children as combatants should immediately take steps to disband all groups in which child soldiers are operating. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa, working in cooperation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and other appropriate United Nations institutions and ECOWAS, should certify that such disbanding has taken place.**

- **The adoption of sanctions against countries using child soldiers should be considered.**

- **All disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes should include education and vocational training and other appropriate assistance for child soldiers.**

- **Mechanisms for reuniting children with their families should be strengthened.**

- **The United Nations, together with ECOWAS, should devise military training manuals and programmes incorporating international human rights and humanitarian law, focused particularly on children's rights.**

- **Governments should ensure that training programmes for military forces and other security agencies include the issue of children's rights.**

- **Technical and financial support should be provided to the ECOWAS secretariat's Child Protection Unit, which is dedicated to the protection of war-affected children, emergency assistance, humanitarian and human rights issues, including early warning capacity and adequate vocational training for children.**

- **The capacity of ECOWAS to monitor the implementation of, and adherence to, international instruments on the rights of the child, and to monitor contraventions of the provisions of those conventions, should be strengthened.**

(h) Child trafficking and child labour

106. Trafficking of children for economic purposes is widely practised in several West African countries. In the underworld of human trade, children are used for purposes such as prostitution, begging and soliciting, construction work, as workers in shops, factories and plantations and as domestic servants. These children are often abused, exposed to hazardous working conditions, confined in the workplace, denied education, basic health care, adequate nutrition, leisure time and the safety and security of their families. Many lose their lives in the process. All lose their basic human rights.

107. In West Africa, millions of young people are affected by this brutal trade. Child trafficking is a complex reality and trafficking networks are generally informal and secretive in nature, making information gathering and the identification of networks and traffickers extremely difficult. In addition, it is often difficult to distinguish between illegitimate and legitimate movements of children across borders.

108. Studies have revealed established trafficking routes, involving private individuals and groups, through Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, the Niger, Nigeria and Togo. Some of these countries are suppliers of the children, others are receivers and transit countries, while some are both suppliers and receivers. Only limited data are available on cross-border movement patterns and mechanisms, and even less on trafficking within countries.

Recommendations

- **Governments should be urged to sign and/or ratify all appropriate conventions and relevant optional protocols.**
- **Vigorous advocacy campaigns should be mounted, aimed at high-level decision makers, and support provided for studies to strengthen knowledge about child trafficking.**
- **Governments should be urged to establish institutions to combat child trafficking within the framework of appropriate mechanisms, such as national commissions.**
- **Transit, supplier and recipient countries of trafficked children should be encouraged to reconfirm the outcome of the subregional consultation on child trafficking, held at Libreville in February 2000, and to adopt national plans of action to stem child trafficking both within and across national boundaries.**
- **Strong partnerships should be forged among the key players — non-governmental organizations, Governments, regional and international organizations and the private sector — at the local and international levels. In this regard, it is important to expand such partnerships to the cocoa and chocolate industry through a compact and a code of ethics for child-labour-free products.**
- **In order to prevent traffickers from perpetrating their trade with impunity, the countries of West Africa should adopt legislation with appropriate sanctions to serve as deterrents to traffickers and their collaborators. Key partners in the effort to achieve harmonization of legal provisions could be ECOWAS and the International Organization for Migration.**

(i) Women and armed conflict

109. The effects of armed conflict fall disproportionately on women. The numbers of households headed by women increases significantly during conflict, as many are widowed through war, lose contact with their husbands, or have husbands who are themselves actors in the war arena. Women are often forced into long-term sexual relations and/or forced labour by more powerful men who are in control of their fate, and prostitution is a common feature of conflict situations.

110. In Sierra Leone, since the signing of the Lomé Peace Agreement in July 1999, although the conflict has generally subsided, civilians have been victims of human rights abuses, women and girls being subjected to systematic rape, particularly by rebel forces. In recent weeks, Sierra Leonean refugees trying to move from Guinea border areas through RUF-held territory on their way to safer areas have been subjected to abuse by RUF forces. Women returnees report many cases of abduction, rape and other forms of sexual abuse.

111. The important role played by women within the subregion in the areas of conflict resolution,

management and reconciliation was acknowledged by the Mission. A number of women's groups are well organized and have established links with groups in other countries with whom they are developing common action plans, in addition to mobilizing civil society to bring pressure to bear on political and military leaders to peacefully resolve conflicts.

Recommendations

- **There should be greater consultation between the United Nations system and women's groups, along with civil society in general, in developing programmes and initiatives. Through such partnerships, direct involvement in conflict resolution and recovery activities of women's groups should be enhanced.**

- **The capacity of women's groups, which is often limited by lack of expertise and resources, should be enhanced so that they can play the fullest possible role in initiatives aimed at promoting peace, security, respect for human rights, and development. This capacity-building dimension should be integrated into all United Nations peace-building and development activities in the subregion.**

(j) Peacekeeping

112. Several interlocutors were critical of a number of United Nations peacekeeping policies, in particular, its approach to peacekeeping initiatives within the subregion. This criticism included perceived inadequacies of mandates, delayed response to emergencies and inadequate support to African contingents operating in peacekeeping efforts in the subregion. Many felt that the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone should be strengthened or changed to peace enforcement.

113. Troop-contributing countries provide contingents to United Nations peacekeeping operations either under the so-called "wet" or "dry" leasing arrangements. Under the wet leasing arrangement, the troop contributors must fully equip and sustain their troops and they are reimbursed for this, whereas under the dry leasing arrangement varying degrees of support are provided by the United Nations. Many West African troop contributors have opted for a wet leasing arrangement when a dry leasing arrangement would have been more within their means. Due to the strain on already overstretched resources associated with the provision of peacekeepers by Governments, a number of interlocutors stressed the need to review the arrangements for systems of support to peacekeeping contingents so that major equipment and logistical assistance are provided by the United Nations. The experience in Sierra Leone has demonstrated that the wet lease arrangement with the African contingents has not worked. Under instructions from the Secretary-General, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations has been working to address this problem together with troop-contributing countries. Several interlocutors also complained that the procedure for obtaining reimbursements from the United Nations is unduly cumbersome and that there are inordinate delays in receiving payments.

Recommendations

- **The United Nations and the international community should do more to assist West African countries that are willing to provide peacekeeping troops but find that meeting United Nations requirements regarding equipment and sustainment are unduly burdensome.**

- **Representatives of potential troop-contributing countries should be adequately informed about United Nations rules and regulations governing the wet and dry leasing policies. The dry lease option, which is more commensurate to the means of West African countries, should be systematically proposed.**

- **The United Nations should strengthen the capacity of ECOWAS to implement its programmes and plans in the area of peacekeeping, including through the strengthening of ECOWAS headquarters arrangements, training centres and the provision of logistical and technical support, when required.**

(k) Implementing targeted sanctions

114. The recent adoption by the Security Council of resolution 1343 (2001), regarding Liberia, was discussed with interlocutors in the context of the current crisis in the Mano River Union countries. The belief was generally expressed that, despite the arms embargo imposed by the Security Council on Liberia

since 1992, arms were widely circulating inside the country. Regarding the sanctions on Liberia adopted by the Security Council in resolution 1343 (2001), several interlocutors were of the view that the threat of such sanctions might be more effective than their actual imposition. Concerns were voiced by Liberian civil society representatives that the Liberian people and not just the Government might be adversely affected by the proposed sanctions. They felt that steps should be taken to ensure that the effect of the sanctions on the population as a whole was minimized, including on diamond miners working in Liberia. In this regard, they stressed that the sanctions being proposed should be well targeted to ensure that they do not worsen the already difficult humanitarian and socio-economic situation in Liberia.

115. It was widely felt that, in dealing with Liberia, close cooperation would be needed between the Security Council and ECOWAS, and that it was necessary to adopt a two-track approach, involving punitive action and dialogue with the Government of Liberia, in order to achieve the required results.

Recommendations

- **The Security Council should dispatch a monitoring mechanism to Liberia to verify the country's compliance with the terms of the resolution prior to the deadline of 7 May 2001, after which the sanctions could come into effect.**
- **There should be close collaboration between the monitoring mechanism, and other mechanisms established by the United Nations, and the monitoring committee recently established by ECOWAS.**
- **Should the sanctions be imposed, the United Nations should work to ensure that they are effectively implemented, including through cooperation concerning their implementation among the countries of West Africa, both individually and collectively.**
- **Any sanctions imposed should be well targeted to ensure that their impact on the general Liberian population is minimized**

2. Governance and human rights

116. Poor governance and human rights violations are among the main causes of conflict in the region. It is important that local communities and people are empowered in a democratic process to ensure that they have a voice and can be effective participants in the governance of their countries. Dialogue between Governments and opposition parties, as well as dissident groups, needs to be encouraged to promote a genuine process of national reconciliation, including the issue of accountability where gross violations of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law might have occurred.

117. Judicial systems need to be reinforced, the independence of judges and lawyers promoted and their impartiality protected. This will help ensure respect for the rule of law and protection of the human rights of all, without discrimination. Freedom of association and freedom of the press need to be ensured. Respect for human rights is non-negotiable.

118. It was particularly highlighted in Ghana, Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria that democratization ran the risk of failing if people did not perceive that they were gaining any "dividends", in particular improvements in the economic and social conditions, from the adoption of democratic principles. An essential tool for conflict prevention and management is the support given to States in transition to allow adequate delivery of social and economic programmes to ensure that social discontent does not jeopardize the democratic process.

119. Human rights concerns cut across the issues of peace, security and development. A human rights dimension should be part of all activities aimed at conflict prevention, management and resolution programmes at the subregional and national levels. Support should be provided to subregional institutions for the promotion of human rights. Support and assistance should be provided in the field of human rights education including a culture of tolerance and raising awareness about human rights through information campaigns and new information technologies. The development of subregional and national plans of action and the establishment of subregional institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights will strengthen national capacities and requires United Nations support.

120. Greater partnership with civil society groups will be essential in developing programmes to promote

participatory democracy, respect for human rights and better governance practices by Governments. In this regard, the United Nations should do more to support relevant activities of subregional civil society groups, including women's, youth and religious organizations.

121. A situation exists of impunity for gross human rights violations and war crimes as well as economic crimes. Justice and truth are essential to national reconciliation and must be sought, especially in countries in transition. Non-governmental entities and the business sector need to be held accountable for illicit activities which often help to prolong conflict.

122. Under the United Nations programme of technical cooperation in the field of human rights, OHCHR works with Governments, civil society and national and regional institutions on institutional capacity-building for the promotion and protection of human rights. A technical cooperation project has been designed to strengthen the capacity of ECOWAS to integrate human rights in all activities and assist in organizing and developing a subregional action plan focusing on vulnerable groups and conflict prevention.

123. Religious, ethnic and regional tensions in several West African countries, particularly Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria and Senegal, are a threat to peace, stability and development in the subregion. West African countries should make use of the preparation for, and follow-up to, the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, to be held at Durban, South Africa from 31 August to 7 September 2001, to stimulate national discussions on these issues and take practical steps to combat ethnic, religious and other kinds of discrimination.

124. Cooperation with the human rights machinery, including the mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights and the treaty monitoring system, could provide useful tools for the countries to take stock of problems and devise strategies. For example, visits by Special Rapporteurs on mercenaries, summary executions, religious intolerance and the right to education could be requested by Governments in the subregion. Civil society should be educated on the use of the international procedures for the promotion and protection of human rights.

Recommendations

- **Education programmes on the fundamentals of the democratic process should be further developed and implemented.**
- **Strong support should be given to States in transition for social and economic programmes to help prevent levels of social discontent that would jeopardize the democratic process.**
- **Judicial systems need to be reinforced to help ensure the effective application of the rule of law and justice and prevent human rights abuses.**
- **A human rights dimension should be part of national and subregional programmes of conflict prevention, management and resolution.**
- **Assistance should be provided to subregional institutions for campaigns for the promotion of human rights, including through new information technologies.**
- **Assistance should be provided for the development and implementation of subregional and national plans of action, and subregional institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights should be established.**
- **The role of non-State actors, including the business sector, in zones of conflict in West Africa should be carefully examined. Steps should be taken to hold these entities accountable for any illicit activities which exacerbate conflict.**

3. *Provision of humanitarian assistance*

(a) Refugees

125. Concern was expressed about the presence of large numbers of refugees close to the border between Guinea and Sierra Leone. As experience has shown in countries in conflict, such as Burundi, Liberia, Rwanda, Senegal and Sierra Leone, this situation not only poses threats to the security of the host country but also involves the risk that the refugees may be infiltrated or attacked by armed groups. Corrective steps need to be taken, from the outset of any refugee movements into neighbouring countries, so as to ensure

enforcement of international and OAU conventions regarding the settling of refugees far enough from the border for their security. In keeping with those conventions, it is imperative and urgent that the Sierra Leonean refugees, currently in the "parrot's beak" area of Guinea, continue to be moved to safer areas.

126. In transferring the refugees, effective measures should be taken to ensure that militia groups or armed elements do not infiltrate their ranks and to prevent the enlistment of refugees by militias within the camps. To this end, the Government of Guinea should do its utmost to guarantee safe haven to the refugees and the international community should provide the necessary assistance and support.

127. The Mission noted that assistance to Liberian refugees has been significantly reduced in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Guinea. The official reason given for this was that the prevailing conditions in the country were conducive to their return and that Liberia had been at peace for three years. Many refugees have chosen to remain in the host countries, however, since they do not consider that the security conditions in Liberia and the environment are conducive for their return. As the Liberian refugees receive very limited assistance, many are in competition with the host community as they strive to meet basic needs, putting an undue burden on host Governments. This has also aggravated an already fragile situation, sometimes causing security problems. The criteria which have caused this reduction in assistance to these Liberian refugees now appear obsolete and should be reviewed.

128. As already noted, many Governments and civil society interlocutors, including representatives of refugee communities, were highly critical of the inclination of international donors to provide much higher levels of funding for humanitarian emergencies and assistance programmes for refugees and internally displaced persons in Europe than in Africa, where large gaps between needs and funding were invariably found.

Recommendations

- **In conformity with the relevant international and OAU conventions, refugees in the subregion should be settled far enough from borders of host countries to ensure their security.**
- **In this regard, Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees, currently in the "parrot's beak" area of Guinea, should continue to be moved to safer areas. Adequate and timely support will have to be provided to the Government of Guinea and all agencies concerned to ensure the smooth implementation of this process.**
- **Effective measures should be taken to ensure that militia groups or armed elements do not infiltrate the ranks of refugees being transferred to safer areas and that refugees are not enlisted by militias within camps.**
- **The Government of Sierra Leone should ensure that adequate preparations are made for the reception of refugees opting for voluntary repatriation including through the identification of safe repatriation zones within Sierra Leone, in close cooperation with UNHCR and UNAMSIL, and other international and national partners.**
- **Assistance needs to be targeted to both refugee and host communities.**
- **The Government of Guinea should do its utmost to guarantee safe haven to the refugees, with the international community providing necessary assistance and support.**
- **The criteria which have caused the reduction in assistance to the Liberian refugees in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Guinea should be reviewed. In the meantime, assistance should be provided immediately in those cases where the conditions for safe and voluntary return of these refugees to their communities of origin are not met.**
- **International donors should particularly review their practices for funding humanitarian programmes for refugees and internally displaced persons to ensure that there is consistency in covering requirements and needs wherever they occur worldwide and that disparities are eliminated.**

(b) Ensuring safe access and safe passage

129. In view of the security situation along the borders between Guinea and Liberia, the Mission noted that the targeted emergency response of humanitarian agencies in addressing the security concerns of both refugees and staff is welcomed. The principle of "safe access and safe passage for refugees" must be applied in order

for humanitarian agencies to provide effective assistance to refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities. To this effect the commitment of both the host Government and militia groups is essential. It is therefore recommended that agreement be reached at the subregional level, which would guarantee the application of this principle. The principle of adequate protection and "safe passage" also applies to all humanitarian workers.

Recommendations

- **All fighting forces should commit themselves to ensure safe access and safe passage to refugees, internally displaced persons and humanitarian agencies.**
- **Agreement should be reached at the subregional level, which would guarantee the application of this principle.**

(c) Internally displaced persons and host communities

130. In addition to the meagre resources devoted to African refugees and internally displaced persons, the severe impact on them is now threatening the traditional offering of hospitality by West African communities. It has also contributed to "asylum fatigue" on the part of host communities and countries.

Recommendations

- **United Nations agencies and concerned Governments should design and implement area-development programmes that would cover basic social services including the health, nutrition, education, water and sanitation needs of returning refugees, internally displaced persons and the host communities.**
- **National capacities will need to be reinforced to better manage and service both internally displaced persons and host communities.**
- **To meet funding requirements for these initiatives, consolidated appeals should explicitly include programmes to meet the needs of both internally displaced persons and host communities.**
- **Effective reintegration and resettlement of internally displaced persons should be treated as an important component of any peace process in accordance with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.**

(d) Security of humanitarian personnel

131. Concern over the security and protection of humanitarian workers operating in the subregion has risen in recent years. Incidents of hostage-taking, killing and the abduction of humanitarian workers in Guinea in the past several months have highlighted this concern. Rebel groups operating in conflict zones generally do not heed the principles of internationally recognized conventions or rules concerning warfare. Often it is difficult for United Nations agencies to operate as the Organization is seen as being "on the side" of the Government or that of an opposing entity.

Recommendations

- **The safety of all humanitarian workers has to be guaranteed by all parties to conflict so that humanitarian assistance can be provided to people in need.**

(e) Funding

132. The Mission noted with concern the consequences of funding shortfalls on the provision of humanitarian assistance and the security of humanitarian workers. Assistance in such critical sectors as education, income generation, community services and capacity-building and those ensuring basic life-sustaining activities for refugees and internally displaced persons is being reduced or cut. This trend needs to be reversed by raising donor awareness of the long-term negative impacts of funding reductions on peace, stability and security. United Nations agencies have a critical role to play in raising this concern with key donors.

133. The Mission noted that in West Africa, as elsewhere, there is a reluctance on the part of the international community to devote resources to conflict prevention and peace-building measures even though huge costs are involved in dealing with situations after conflicts have erupted.

Recommendations

- **Adequate and timely funding should be provided by donors to support conflict prevention and humanitarian assistance and development programmes.**

- **Funding should be sufficient to meet the security needs of humanitarian workers.**

4. Economic development and regional integration

(a) The poverty environment

134. Poverty is pervasive in the subregion, with about 50 per cent of the population living on less than $1 a day. The ongoing crisis in the Mano River Union countries and political instability in several other countries make prospects for arresting the economic decline uncertain. In addition, approximately 50 per cent of the population in the subregion are less than 15 years old and state investments in education and health care are very low. This high poverty level constitutes an ever-increasing crisis for youth as it is accompanied by high unemployment and diminishing opportunities for the involvement of youth in economic growth and development. This dismal situation provides a breeding ground for the recruitment of youth into militias and their involvement in other illicit activities.

135. Several interlocutors noted the sizeable increase in unemployment and poverty in recent years in urban areas. For example, over the past 10 years, the part of the population living below the poverty line in Abidjan has risen from 1 to 20 per cent. The prospects for an improvement in the situation for the urban poor appears bleak, with the stagnation in job creation in the formal sector and the near saturation in the informal sector. Programmes to assist in accelerating economic growth, coupled with debt reduction measures, would go a long way in reversing these negative trends.

136. Several interlocutors noted the negative effects of corruption on the development of the subregion. Some interlocutors, referring to the debt problem, indicated that some of the loans contracted by previous Governments and for which the citizens and Governments are now being held accountable were not used for the benefit of the countries concerned. It was considered that corrupt governmental officials and others had siphoned off large amounts of money into private ventures and their own bank accounts. Those interlocutors, while condemning corruption in their own countries, also criticized the imposed obligation of paying for debts which had not been used to benefit their countries.

137. Many civil society interlocutors were of the view that many socio-economic problems were compounded by corruption among government officials, past and present, and individuals who abetted them. They were of the view that corruption which was rampant in many Governments in the subregion had contributed to the prevailing conditions of poverty and underdevelopment. They cited, for example, failed privatization programmes which transferred national assets to government officials and those abetting them. They were also very critical of unscrupulous business people who continue to assist some Governments and non-state actors to exploit raw materials in the subregion, the profits from which did not benefit national treasuries. The interlocutors also expressed the view that government expenditures should be allocated to reflect the priority needs of the people. They called for a reduction in military expenditures and an increase in development spending.

(b) Economic integration

138. The Mission is of the view that special attention should be paid to issues concerning subregional integration, in particular those relating to the realignment of subregional institutions working on integration and the harmonization of donor interventions to respond comprehensively to subregional initiatives promoting integration.

139. Regarding the realignment of subregional institutional groupings working on different facets of integration, the Mission noted that most interlocutors saw ECOWAS emerging as the main centre for integration. It was acknowledged that the strength and efficiency of ECOWAS institutions and mechanisms, and its ability to respond effectively to all the challenges of integration in a reasonable time frame, depended on commitment to support them.

140. Interlocutors envisaged a central role being played by ECOWAS in subregional integration with complementary roles by UEMOA, BCEAO, CILSS, ANAD, the Mano River Union and other such groupings. The argument conveyed to the Mission and worthy of support is that ECOWAS should be strengthened to emerge as the pre-eminent organization, while at the same time other subregional institutions should be assisted to allow them to evolve into service centres, providing specific support services within an ECOWAS-led integration process. In this regard, for example, it was mentioned that UEMOA and BCEAO, which are more advanced than ECOWAS in issues of financial and economic integration, could

be instrumental in providing service and technical support to ECOWAS. The interlocutors recognized the need to support ECOWAS in those areas that would improve its capacity as a driving force towards integration. Support is needed for capacity-building in the secretariat itself and to revitalize and enhance mechanisms dealing with the broader issues of early warning and conflict prevention, law, judiciary and human rights, common currency and economic issues, including tariff structures and freedom of movement, as well as investments in infrastructure that will broaden economic space and markets.

141. A second matter, linked to the issue of integration, is the harmonization of support and approaches by international actors. In this regard, there was general endorsement of the need to develop holistic and comprehensive approaches to a variety of issues, including conflict prevention and management. For example, several interlocutors felt that any approach to the crisis in the Mano River Union countries should use a holistic and integrated approach, and might require a larger role for subregional organizations. The need for harmonization of support and approaches will require the United Nations system and the international donor community to work together more closely in designing programmes that respond to the needs of the subregion. The institutional arrangements at headquarters and in the subregion should also be geared towards supporting collaborative and comprehensive interventions generally using a subregional or zonal approach.

142. Several interlocutors expressed appreciation for efforts already under way in subregional programming, such as those of USAID, the European Union and several United Nations agencies including the World Bank and ECA. In their view, such efforts would accelerate the integration process if they reinforced mechanisms and initiatives already launched by ECOWAS which are at various stages of implementation, including initiatives in the areas of peace and security, energy and transport, policy harmonization and freedom of circulation of people and goods. Coordinated support to ECOWAS initiatives would enhance the organization's capacity to accelerate integration and, by working through or alongside ECOWAS initiatives, would enhance collaboration among all partners and ECOWAS within a shared framework.

Recommendations

- **Strategic intervention programmes should focus on economic growth and a lessening of the debt burden, as a critical means to create an enabling environment for economic growth and development. Poverty reduction can only occur as a direct result of accelerated and equitable economic growth in a relatively debt-free environment.**
- **Socio-economic intervention programmes must be geared, in particular, towards alleviating the growing youth unemployment crisis.**
- **The international community should consider the strengthening of EOWAS in those areas which better enable it to act as a driving force towards subregional integration.**
- **The international community should support efforts by ECOWAS, UEMOA and other subregional institutions to create a framework for integration in which ECOWAS occupies a central position.**
- **Support should be provided for capacity-building in the ECOWAS secretariat, as well as to revitalize and enhance mechanisms dealing with the broader issues of early warning and conflict prevention, law, judiciary and human rights, common currency and economic issues, including tariff structures and freedom of movement, as well as investments in infrastructures that will broaden economic space and markets.**
- **Institutional arrangements at headquarters and in the subregion should also be geared towards supporting collaborative and comprehensive interventions generally using a subregional or zonal approach.**
- **To enhance the capacity of ECOWAS to accelerate economic integration, development partners should support the organization's mechanisms and activities in the following general areas:**

  Agricultural development and food security

  Industry, science, technology and energy

  Environment and natural resources

  Transport, communications and tourism

Trade, customs and statistics

Education programmes for women and enhancement of their roles in promoting peace and development.

V. Follow-up

143. The Inter-agency Mission recommends that the present report be communicated to ECOWAS, the Organization of African Unity, the World Bank, the European Union and major international bilateral and other multilateral partners and that appropriate arrangements be made to further the discussion with those organizations and partners on the implementation of a subregional comprehensive approach to addressing the multi-faceted problems facing West Africa.

144. Following successful implementation in West Africa, subregional comprehensive approaches should be explored in other parts of Africa, in close cooperation with OAU and relevant African subregional organizations.

Annex

List of participants

The mission was led by the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Ibrahima Fall.

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* Mr. Doumaye participated in meetings in Guinea-Bissau.

** Mr. Abou Moussa participated in meetings at Bamako.

World Food Programme

Felix Bamezon, Deputy Director, Liaison Office, New York

United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament, Lomé

Ivor Fung, Director

Economic Community of West African States secretariat, Abuja

Roger Lalcupo, Director, Legal Affairs Division